

# *Sketch*

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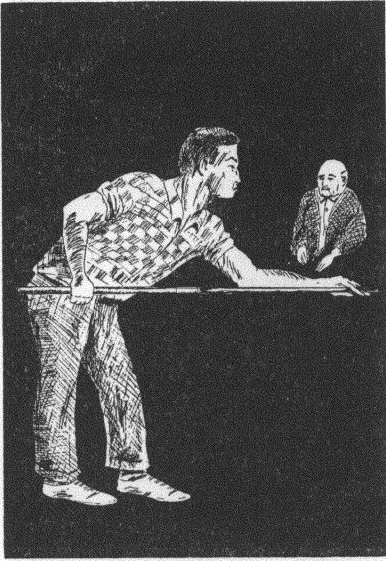
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## Uncle Norman

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## Uncle Norman

by *Betty Baldwin*

THE old man had dozed off. He was practically lying down in the big stuffed rocking chair, his hands crushing the evening *Tribune* against his chest. Jerry glanced toward the kitchen. Mom would hit the ceiling if she knew he was sleeping in that chair. She hated to pull the cushions back together and readjust the slipcover every time Uncle Norman came over. He knew just what she'd say. "Honestly, look at it sagging. It looks like the wrath of God! You'd think with two perfectly good davenports in the house he wouldn't have to lie squeewad in that rocking chair. It's not a bed, and he isn't the smallest man in the world. He's got the springs all pushed out underneath. Besides that, his bald head grinds in grease spots that just don't come out."

She shouldn't be so hard on him, Jerry thought as he peered into the den again. He's only a helpless old man. Jerry couldn't remember when Uncle Norman had looked as fat as he did now, spread all over the rocker. The huge frame slowly rose and sank in the chair with the heavy breathing. He took air in long gulps, then wheezed as it rushed out ruffling his moustache. His thick reading glasses with the tiny metal frames were precariously balanced well down over his nose, each glass resting atop a fleshy red cheek.

Jerry tip-toed into the room and pulled the card table over, trying to make just enough noise to rouse him. It worked. Throwing a quite startled look toward his invader, Uncle Norman suddenly winced and heaved forward. The rocker made one long, low squeek as he sat up, paper sliding to the floor.

"Thought you might like to play some cards before dinner," Jerry said and scrambled after the paper.

Uncle Norman was blinking hard. "Whaa! — Yep!"

He leaned far back in the rocker and tugged at his watch fob. With seemingly great effort he pulled on the long gold chain until his trusty old stop watch appeared. He squinted through his glasses, then hastily snatched them off.

"Should know I can't see nothin' through them things. That's what's the matter with this world. Too many things to worry about! Like an extra pair of eyes, for instance. How are ya going to know when you need four and when ya need two? Always got'em on when ya need'em off, and when ya need'em, ya never got'em at all. My eyes ain't like they used to be."

His stiff moustache twitched and a glow crept into his soft gray eyes. "Well, beat all. It's only 5:30. Guess we'd have time for a game."

That's Uncle Norman, thought Jerry, he's probably been here since four o'clock just waiting for dinner. He runs on a time clock and four o'clock's time to call it a day and head for supper, especially when Mom does the cooking.

"Get those cards out, Youngin'," the man smiled. "I'll lick you this time. Ya can't still have any of that beginner's luck left in you from yesterday."

Jerry watched the old man deal, as he had so many times before, thousands of times before. Each card slapped, as the fleshy fingers brought it off the top of the deck. It was funny how no one else Jerry knew ever dealt that way. Uncle Norman always did it the same.

"Got to get the poker-face down," he continued. "You'll never be a card player till you can keep what ya get in your hand and not let it show. Okay, lead'em and weep — I haven't played cards all day. The boys down at the hall

didn't seem too interested. They were all trying billiards, so I just talked some and watched out the winder! Everybody *outside* was busy havin' quite a day today bustlin' up and down. I saw the —"

"C'mon for supper," Mom's voice hollered from the kitchen. "Dad's home. Come on, you people, I've called you three times already. Do you want cold pork chops?"

Uncle Norman's eyes dropped. His smile faded away as he laid down his cards. "Well, that's that, but leave'em; we might find a minute afterwards — that is, if you won't be runnin' right off. That's what's the matter with this world. Everybody's runnin' here, runnin' there. Now if you was like me, ya wouldn't have to worry. My legs ain't like they used to be. I just go as far as I kin go, an' then quit. That's what ya gotta do, Jerry boy. Just do what ya kin do, and don't gripe about what is — let's eat."

Jerry looked around the table. He caught his mother's glance flitting from Uncle Norman's plate to his Dad's understanding eyes. He could just hear her. "Honestly, what are we going to do? He eats enough to feed five or six horses. That's only his third pork chop. It wouldn't be so bad, except he eats like a horse. Sawing at his meat — as if my pork chops weren't ready to fall off the bone already. And why must he always put that silly napkin in his collar; although, heaven only knows, he does need a bib." Jerry's gaze reached his Uncle Norman. His face was radiant as he stabbed at another piece of juicy porkchop and popped it into his mouth.

## He Told A Tree

*by John C. N. Smith*

He told a tree his secrets,  
And I told the wind of his  
Vain effort.